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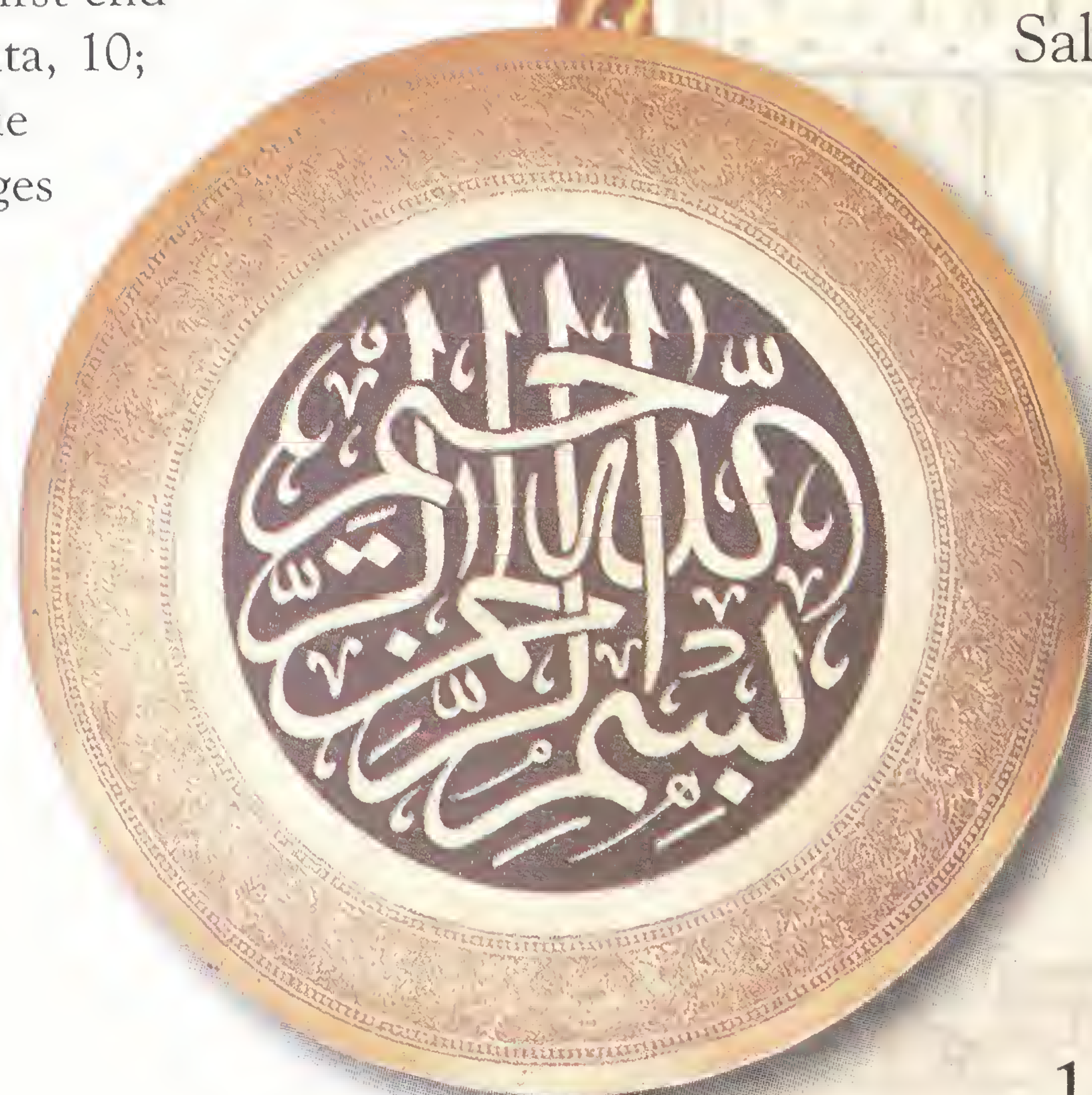
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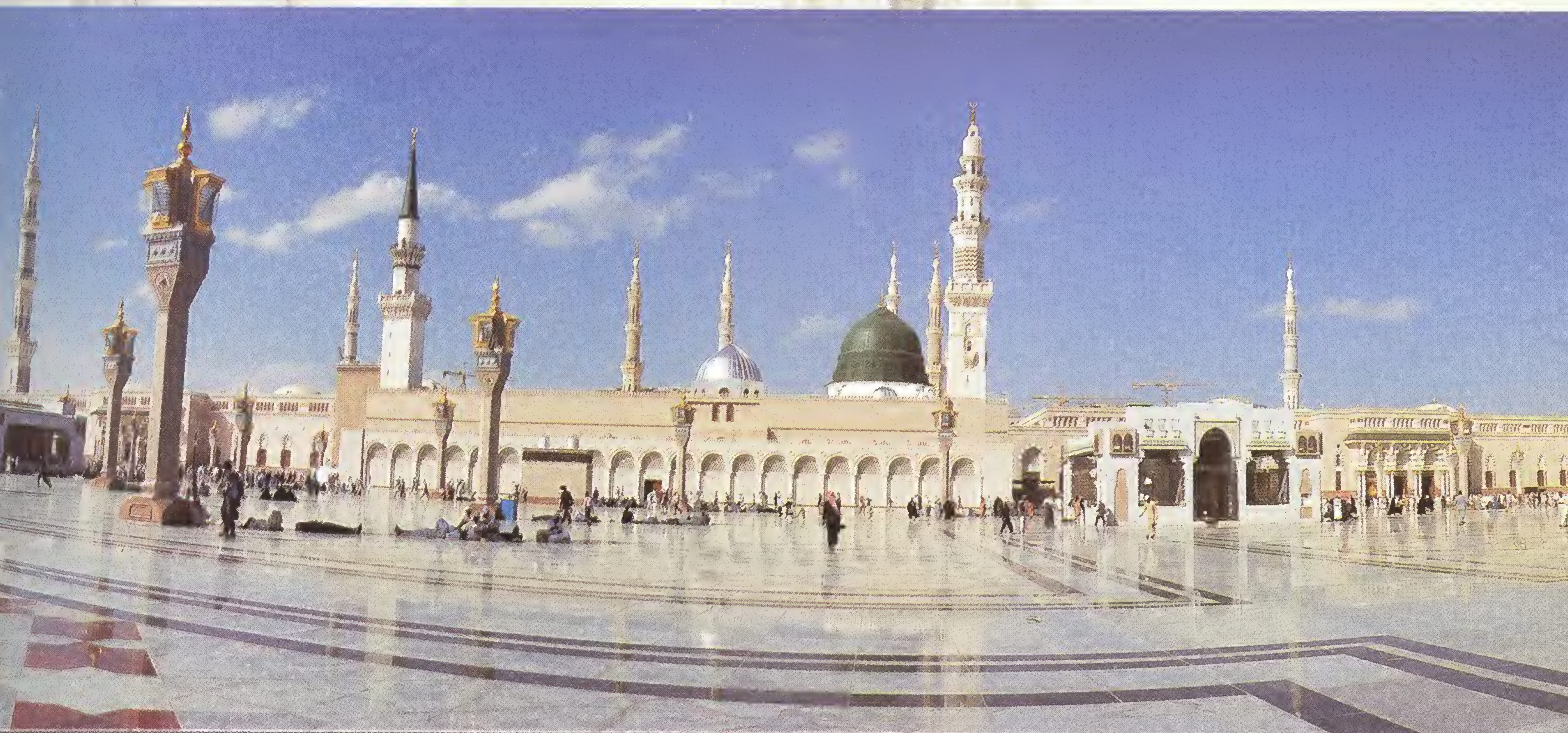
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# 1. Birth of the Prophet



The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was born in 570 A.D., in the land of Arabia. Much of Arabia is desert—vast, silent, barren regions where the stars loom large at night and where people depend for their survival upon shade, water and each other's goodwill. There were three major towns: Yathrib, a large oasis now called Madinah; Taif, a cool refuge in the mountains famous for its grapes; and Makkah which, by contrast, lay in a barren valley. It was in Makkah that the Prophet ﷺ first saw the light of day.

Now Makkah is famous as the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the focal point of the Hajj pilgrimage, but in those days it was important because it was at the junction of many trading routes. It was even more important as the home of the Kabah, where people came from far and wide to worship. The original Kabah was built by the Prophets Ibrahim عليه السلام and Ismail عليه السلام (Abraham and Ishmael), whose lives were particularly devoted to Allah.

The Prophet Muhammad's father, Abdullah, died two months before his birth, and his mother, Aminah, was naturally very sad. But still, she felt strong and well as she waited for her baby to be born. When he came into the world, Aminah sent word to her father-in-law, Abd al-Muttalib, who was sitting near the Kabah as he always did.

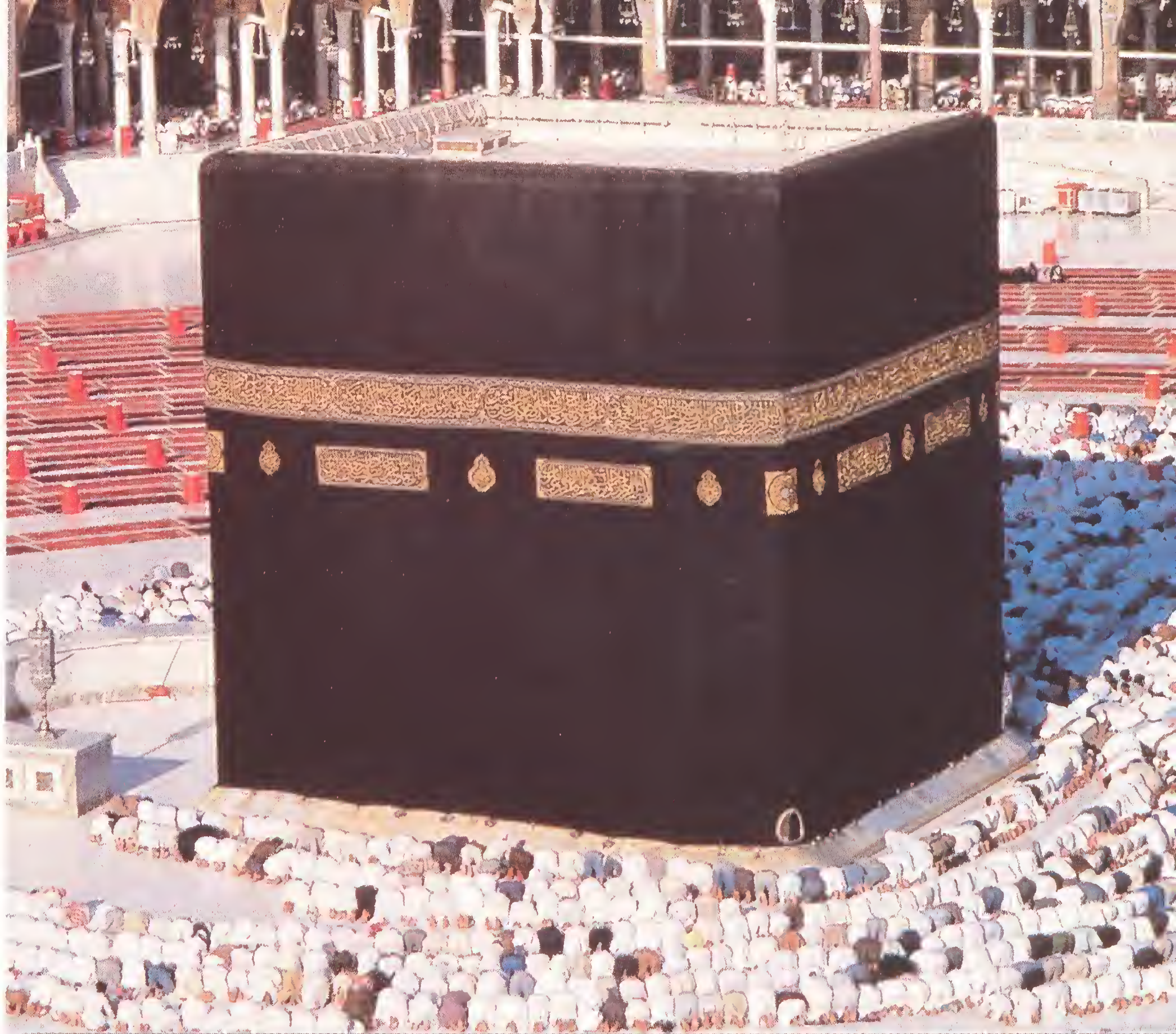
Abd al-Muttalib was the head of the Quraysh tribe, guardian of the Kabah and protector of the pilgrims who visited this holy place. He was respected and admired by all. But he was not like the other Arabs who had drifted away from the teachings of the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام and had begun again to worship idols. He was one of the *hanifs*, or pious people, who believed in Allah, the one true God, with all his heart. He was happy to





hear the news of the birth and began to think of a name for the baby boy. Finally he decided upon Muhammad, an unusual name that means “often praised,” or “worthy of praise.”

For some time before his birth, believers had prayed for a prophet to come, and there had been signs that Allah had heard their prayers. Jewish scriptures told of a prophet that was to come. On the night of the Prophet’s birth a learned Jew in Yathrib saw a brilliant star he had never seen before. He called people together around him and, pointing to the star, told them that a prophet must have been born. Word spread quickly.



▲ The original Kabah was built by the Prophets Ibrahim ؑ and Ismail ؑ, whose lives were entirely devoted to Allah. But over the centuries people began to drift away from the One God and set up idols there to many other gods. In the days of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Kabah was surrounded by 360 altars, statues and cult objects of these various deities. The most important tribe living in and around Makkah was the Quraysh. They were merchants who had control of both the Kabah and Makkah’s water supply. They profited greatly from giving protection and catering to the needs of the vast numbers of traders who came from far and wide to buy and sell, and the thousands of pilgrims from many different countries. It was into this tribe that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was born.

## An Example to All Human Beings

Allah sends prophets into the world to show us how to live. That is why Allah sent the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ into the world also. But He did not want him to live like a hermit, to give up the world and go and live by himself in a mountain cave, or in a forest. Granted, it is much easier to lead a pure life and to think about the Almighty when you are not troubled by worldly matters and you are away from people and temptations. But because Allah wanted the Prophet ﷺ to be a shining example to humanity, He destined him to live amongst other human beings, like any other ordinary man — to have a family, to work for his living and to have his share of troubles, joys and sorrows.



## 2. Nursed in the Desert

### Good Family Ties

The Prophet ﷺ revered parents. He would say: "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers," and "God's pleasure is in the father's pleasure; and God's displeasure is in the father's displeasure." Those, he believed, who served their parents well, were deserving of Paradise. A man once asked the Prophet ﷺ, "Who rightfully deserves the best treatment from me?" "Your mother," said the Prophet ﷺ. Then the man said, "Who comes next?" "Your mother," said the Prophet ﷺ. "Who is after that?" asked the man, "Your mother," was the Prophet's answer. "Who comes next?" insisted the man again. "Your father," said the noble Prophet ﷺ.

The Prophet ﷺ gave great importance to family ties. He said, "The best man is he who is best to his wife."

It was the custom in those days, in Makkah, for mothers to send their babies into the desert to be nursed by paid foster mothers from among the people who tended sheep. The weather in the desert, away from the city, was considered more healthy. Aminah, too, did this, and so the little Muhammad ﷺ spent the first years of his life with a woman named Halimah and her family of the Banu Sa'd tribe.

Halimah worried that she would not be able to care properly for the baby Muhammad ﷺ. They were very poor, and because of the previous year's famine, she had hardly enough milk to feed her own baby. But



▲ A desert outside Makkah. It was one such area where the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ spent his early days.

